

March 4, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of Raised Bill 6501, which is intended to “prevent delays in the evaluation process of children suspected of requiring special education and related services.” Though timelines and safeguards do currently exist regarding the special education identification process, the “delays” that are referenced in the above language are directly related to the current state of implementation of the Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) model. Specifically, the SRBI model, and its interface with the special education identification process, in my professional experience as a University professor working in both special education and teacher preparation, remains quite variable and even problematic in certain Connecticut public school districts.

The newly published *Guidelines for Identifying a Child with a Specific Learning Disability* state, on page 30, that one of the criteria for eligibility is, “The child does not make sufficient progress to meet age or state approved grade level standards ... when using a process based on the child’s response to scientific research-based intervention.” In practice, school districts may interpret the Connecticut State Department of Special Education’s language as a *requirement* to complete *all three Tiers* of SRBI *prior* to referral for special education services. An unintended consequence of this interpretation may be an exacerbation of the achievement gap that many of these students demonstrate upon entering public schools. Put differently, public school’s interpretation and subsequent implementation of SRBI may actually delay the identification of children with disabilities thereby delaying the school district’s ability to provide instruction that is aligned, in terms of intensity, frequency and specialization, to individual need. The longer the delay, the more difficult it will be to help these students to “catch-up.”

The Connecticut Special Education State Advisory Committee (SAC), of which I was appointed to in 2008, noted in its *2010 Annual Report* that “...some districts in the state are denying services to special education students in the name of SRBI.” The SAC’s perceptions are aligned to my own professional experiences. The practical questions they raise in the report, regarding the implementation of SRBI in Connecticut, extend beyond special education. Specifically, the questions the SAC raise demonstrate the confusion that many school districts around Connecticut are experiencing while implementing SRBI. In some school districts I interact with SRBI is thought of as a “special education” program. In others, school personnel have not thought through aspects of the model needed for, and prior to, its proper implementation at the elementary, middle and high school levels (e.g., defining Tier I, II, and III interventions, personnel in-charge of service delivery, appropriate progress monitoring, home-school communication regarding service delivery--to name but a few examples). The net result, in many cases, has included special education students unnecessarily languishing in SRBI tiers II and III prior to identification and non-disabled students receiving inadequate and improperly monitored intervention. Raised Bill 6501, if adopted, would help to prevent this from

happening.

In thank you in advance for considering this testimony.

Respectfully,

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